

Friends and Neighbours: Surrounding Communities in the Silvery Slocan

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Local legend has it that "Nakusp" is a First Nations word meaning "safe". Early native inhabitants learned that once they had paddled their canoes beyond a certain point of land they were safe from the turbulent currents in Arrow Lake, and their name for the natural harbour located there was later adopted by white settlers for the name of their town.

As with most other surrounding communities, Nakusp came into being as a result of the Slocan silver rush of the 1890s. Incorporated as a community in 1892, Nakusp became an important supply and distribution point for people travelling to the Slocan silver fields by way of the Arrow Lakes. By 1895 Nakusp was the northern terminus of the Nakusp & Slocan Railway, which was leased by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and which connected to the CPR main line at Revelstoke by way of sternwheelers and barges that plied the Upper Arrow Lake.

Originally, the citizens of Nakusp hoped the town would become the smelting centre for the ores pouring out of the silver fields to the south. These dreams were dashed with the completion of the CPR's line to Slocan City in 1897, however, and by the CPR's purchase of the smelter in Trail the following year. The N&S rail line continued to connect Nakusp to Sandon, however, and was in regular use by the CPR until 1955. The old N&S rail grade survives to this day as the Galena Trail, which caters to hiking and biking enthusiasts alike.

As the importance of mining diminished, Nakusp has continued to survive on logging and agriculture, and is now the largest centre between Nelson and Revelstoke. Highways and ferries have replaced the railways and steamships that first made Nakusp a regional transportation hub, and the only traces of these early days can be found in the artifacts on display in the Nakusp museum.

Rosebery

Named after English financier and nobleman, the Earl of Rosebery, this small community at the mouth of Wilson Creek played a crucial role in the CPR's transportation link between Sandon and the outside world. Blessed with the best natural harbour on Slocan Lake, Rosebery rather than the larger town of New Denver became the transfer point between the CPR's N&S rail line and its sternwheelers and barges. From Rosebery, ore cars were transported by barge south to Slocan City, where they were transferred back onto rails for the trip to the CPR's Trail smelter, or south into Washington state.

During the boom years, Rosebery had a post office, hotels, several stores, and at one point the Rosebery-Surprise Mining Company had a concentrator mill located there. Today only faint traces remain of Rosebery's past. The old rail bridge still stands, although it has deteriorated greatly, and local residents still refer to the old CPR station manager's house as the "Rosebery Manor".

Today, Rosebery continues to survive because of its harbour. Where ore cars were once transferred, however, large booms are now used to transport logs to the sawmill at Slocan City. A small bedroom community of more than 100 residents, Rosebery still has two small restaurants and a provincial campground.

New Denver

First named "El Dorado", the townsite of New Denver was created in 1891 to service the thousands of miners and prospectors flooding into the Slocan. Never a mining town, New Denver was still an important supply and service hub, as well as the centre for government in the region. Hotels and businesses boomed in the growing town as passengers disembarked from sternwheelers on Slocan Lake. Most would stay at least overnight before catching the CPR train to Three Forks or Sandon the following day.

More sedate than its rowdy boomtown neighbour, New Denver became home to many of Sandon's more affluent business people, who chose to raise their children well away from the

"riffraff" who thronged to Sandon. As a result, many of Sandon's wealthier early pioneers were actually buried in the New Denver cemetery, rather than in the small Sandon graveyard. Although never as large as Sandon, New Denver survives today because its economy was not linked exclusively to mining, but instead diversified and survived on logging and agriculture.

Like Sandon, New Denver became a relocation centre for Japanese-Canadian internees during the Second World War. Many of the small shacks used to house these internees are still scattered throughout the village. A number of the internees and their descendants still live in New Denver. Their story is excellently portrayed at the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre, the only facility of its kind in Canada. In addition, the Silvery Slocan Museum, located in the turn-of-the-century Bank of Montreal building on Main Street houses an excellent collection of artifacts and photos from New Denver's past.

Silverton

Originally staked in 1892 by pioneer storekeeper William Hunter, Silverton was to become the second-most important mining town in the Slocan district. The same summer, prospector Mike Grady, led by a hunting party of natives, discovered rich outcroppings of galena ore in the mountains behind Hunter's townsite. With two partners, Grady returned and staked their "Echo", "Alpha" and "Standard" claims, all of which were destined to ensure the future of Hunter's town on Four Mile Creek, later renamed Silverton Creek. Many of Silverton's great mines were located on the south side of Idaho Mountain, and their workings head in the direction of Sandon. Many geologists believe that there are still great ore bodies waiting to be discovered deep in the mountains between Silverton and Sandon.

Unlike most other communities in the area, Silverton never had a railway, but instead relied on sternwheelers and barges on Slocan Lake to bring in supplies and haul ore out. In its heyday, Silverton had many hotels, stores, and other businesses. A major landmark within the village boundaries until recent years was the large concentrator mill of the Standard mine.

Today, Silverton survives as a peaceful community of approximately 300 residents. Over 40 historic homes and buildings still remain, including the Silverton Hotel, the Finland cabin and blacksmith shop, and William Hunter's original residence. An excellent outdoor mining museum containing much of Sandon's historic mining machinery is on display year-round at the Silverton Gallery.

Slocan City

Like most other communities in the Silvery Slocan, Slocan City came into existence in the early 1890s. It began as a tent town for people who walked the Slocan River trail on their way to rich mines in the Sandon area. Slocan City was located at the south end of Slocan Lake and it served as a transfer point for people passing on from foot to boat.

In the early 1890s, several important mines were discovered in the area of Slocan City but the community itself did not reach full prominence until the CPR arrived there in 1897. Once the railway was complete, and steamships and barges connected it to the Sandon line, Slocan City had assured success. It rapidly became an important port and supply center, and by 1901 it had become an incorporated city. The name Slocan City was readily accepted because the term "City" distinguished it from the Slocan region.

Slocan City suffered the same setbacks as neighboring towns when mining declined, and by World War II it was virtually a ghost town. Like many other area communities, Slocan City was used as an internment centre for Japanese-Canadians during the war. In 1958 it was disincorporated, and it reverted to a village status. In recent years Slocan City, now known only as Slocan, has become an important sawmill and logging center.

Valley Of The Ghosts

The valley between Three Forks and Kaslo is known as "the Valley of the Ghosts" for the many ghost towns which remained there until the 1980s. Many of them were simply large mining camps, and stations along the K&S Railway.

The more important of these were the communities of McGuiggan, Zincton, and Whitewater (later renamed Retallack.) Whitewater and Zincton had concentrator mills, and all had post offices, hotels and stores. Whitewater was the largest community, with a peak population of close to 1,000.

The Valley of the Ghosts was devastated by several forest fires which over the years have erased most evidence of these communities. Even buildings from more recent years have almost all succumbed to the blows of salvagers. Today the only remnants of these old ghost towns are a handful of buildings located at Retallack.

Kaslo

Kaslo, at one time the second-largest community in the Slocan, was born on the wealth of the Sandon mines. Kaslo was the eastern terminus of the K&S Railway, the lifeline that joined Sandon and Kaslo. When trains of ore arrived at the docks, men unloaded the narrow-gauge (36-inch) cars and transferred the ore with wheelbarrows onto barges. Sternwheelers or tugboats towed the barges to the railheads at Nelson or Kuskanook, where the ore was reloaded onto standard-gauge (48-inch) railroad cars for the final journey to American smelters.

In 1893 Kaslo became the area's first incorporated city. Like New Denver, Kaslo was not a mining town and consequently was a quieter and more peaceful place than Sandon. Many of Sandon's prominent business people had homes in Kaslo so that their children would not be exposed to Sandon's rougher elements. Similarly, many of Sandon's more affluent pioneers are buried in the Kaslo cemetery.

Kaslo reached its heyday in the late 1890s, and although Sandon eventually far outstripped Kaslo in size, travel between the two communities by rail was common, and the populations of both towns remained close. Unlike Sandon, however, Kaslo had a more diversified economy and when mining began to decline, logging and agriculture were able to make up for the mining losses. During World War II, Kaslo was another internment center for Japanese-Canadian citizens.

Today Kaslo is a healthy modern community with a population of close to 1,000. The SS Moyie, last of the Kootenay Lake sternwheelers, is Kaslo's major historic landmark, and it is now a national historic site. The Langham Cultural Center also has excellent displays on Kaslo's rich history.

Alamo

Located approximately four miles west of Sandon on the old CPR grade is the former community of Alamo. It began as a settlement surrounding the first concentrator mill built in the Slocan. It had a post office, hotels, stores and all the usual amenities to be found in a community of 200 or more.

In 1918 Clarence Cunningham, an inventive, generous and much-loved local mining man, purchased the Alamo, Idaho, and Queen Bess mines. He built a new concentrator mill, the finest in the country, and he became a millionaire over the next few years. Cunningham even built a beautiful mansion complete with English gardens on a bench above Alamo. The Alamo Mill was equipped to custom-mill ore that was brought in on the railway, and was constantly busy with Cunningham's own ore and that of others.

An indication of the respect Cunningham was accorded was that when most other area mines were forced to stop production during a strike, Cunningham's men refused to walk out on him. Despite all his cleverness, wealth and the devotion of his workers, however, disaster loomed for Cunningham. As the 1930s dragged on, the Great Depression caused most mining activity in the Slocan to wither. Desperately, Cunningham invested more and more of his fortune in an effort to keep his mines active. It was said that if a man came to Cunningham with a "hard luck story", he would not turn him away without a meal and a few dollars in his pocket. Sadly, Cunningham himself eventually died penniless.

Today, Alamo is a ghost town. Cunningham's great mill is a colossal ruin and the beautiful mansion is gone, victim of a fire many years ago. Several other collapsing buildings remain and the ruins are impressive. Alamo can be reached by a half-hour walk along the old rail grade from Three Forks.

Three Forks

For three years, from 1892 to 1895, Three Forks was the largest and most important community in the Slocan. Its name comes from its location at the junction of Kane Creek,

Seaton Creek and Carpenter Creek. Originally, the CPR planned to end its Nakusp and Slocan line at Three Forks, thus avoiding the steep and dangerous grade between Three Forks and Sandon. A consortium of Kaslo businessmen and the American-owned Great Northern Railroad had other plans, however.

By 1894, the CPR tracks had reached Three Forks, but the Great Northern's K&S Railway from Kaslo had soon circumvented the CPR. By 1895, the K&S had built a line around Payne Mountain right into Sandon itself, where the richest mines of all were located. Realizing the K&S now had the upper hand, the CPR was forced to extend its line to Sandon as well, thus dooming the once-promising Three Forks.

At its peak, in the early 1890s, close to 2,000 people lived at Three Forks. With a two-stall engine roundhouse and a locomotive turntable, 15 businesses, six hotels, and many homes, the future looked bright. Soon, however, Three Forks was merely a whistle stop along the line. By 1904 the population had dropped to less than 100, and eventually the town withered and died. Today virtually no trace of Three Forks remains.

Cody

Located only 1-1/2 miles upstream from Sandon, this town was named for Henry Cody, the same prospector who discovered the Cody Caves south of Kaslo. Close to several major mines, Cody became an important center in 1896 when the K&S railway connected it by a spur from the Sandon line. The Noble Five mine built a large concentrator mill within the townsite, and at its peak there were over 200 residents, three hotels, a livery and blacksmith shop, three laundries, a dress-maker, a post office and more.

For a while it looked as though Cody might rival Sandon, but quick action by J.M. Harris in 1897 sealed Cody's fate. To protect his interests in Sandon, he constructed the Reco Trail, which connected several major mines with Sandon while bypassing Cody altogether.

After the turn of the century, Cody began to decline and by World War I only the Noble Five mill and buildings associated with it remained. The original Noble Five Mill was torn down in 1918 and was replaced by an even larger mill. The second mill burned in 1944 and a third mill owned by the Cody-Reco company was built on the same site in 1952. It operated only six

months before closing permanently. Today Cody is a true ghost town. The K&S station, the remains of the Noble Five concentrator, and a few shacks still stand. Ruins of the aerial tramway are also still visible.